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ABSTRACT

As the public relations industry changes, so should public relations courses and their content. These changes especially are important for internship programs, which should be subject to periodic assessment and modifications. Crucial questions concerning internships include: (1) What kind of credit should be given to students, faculty and site supervisors? (2) What are the criteria for interning and for becoming an internship site? (3) What are the evaluation criteria? and (4) What are the roles and role relationships of the faculty and site supervisors with each other and with the intern? To answer these questions, an analogical critical method was employed to compare and contrast an existing public relations internship program at a mid-sized university in the southeastern United States with a student teaching program in the education department. Similarities in the two programs included the objectives, the relationships of the parties involved, credit, evaluation, and screening. Differences involved the extent of student participation and evaluation, the type of evaluation, and the benefits afforded the supervisors whether academic or professional. Findings suggest that: (1) a campaigns class could serve as the public relations version of a block course or capstone course--it could be a requirement for an internship completed for course credit; and (2) another form of block--an internship or professional experience training component--could be integrated into the curriculum as a separate course or adjunct to another class. Many site supervisors recommend some sort of practical training for students who arrive with little sense of basic office skills or protocol. This training component could include application and interviewing procedures as well. Other suggestions relate to formalizing internship procedures. (Contains 20 references.) (TB)

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Public Relations Internships and Student Teaching:

A Cross-Disciplinary Analogical Criticism

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Abstract: The need to evaluate all phases of a public relations program is critical for educators. Nowhere is this need more obvious than with the public relations internship. Using a model of analogical criticism, this essay examines the public relations internship by comparing it with the student teaching program. Results of the significant similarities and differences between the two programs as well as future research implications are discussed.

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Public Relations Internships and Student Teaching: A Cross-Disciplinary Analogical Criticism

As the public relations industry changes, so should public relations courses and their content. The fact that public relations programs have seen dramatic increases in the numbers of majors and the fact that the field of public relations continues to evolve underscore the need to conduct self-evaluation. In his speech, "A Practitioner Looks at Public Relations Education," David Ferguson (1987), former United States Steel public affairs manager and senior consultant at Hill and Knowlton, said, "What is taught today will have a relatively short life and will have to be altered considerably almost on a yearly basis if education is to continue to keep pace with practice in our profession. Thoughtful faculty members are constantly studying their courses and sequences to see that they do keep pace."

These changes especially are important for internship programs which should be subject to periodic assessment and modifications. The importance of the internship is evident in that most programs offer some form of internship or practical experience. In a survey conducted by the 1987 Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education, public relations practitioners and educators were asked what they thought should be taught in undergraduate public relations programs; "internship/practicum/work-study program" tied with English for the highest ratings of the various components. According to the report, "The Commission underscored its conviction that

supervised internship programs are one of the most important facets of undergraduate education in which students have the opportunity and are given guidance to develop sound judgment in various kinds of public relations problem-solving situations" (27).

The report provided some guidance in suggesting requirements for internship programs. These included the recommendations for faculty supervision; a program related to the classroom; on-site supervision by experienced public relations practitioners; regular classroom setting meetings; the assignment of a special project involving problem analysis, programming, implementation and evaluation; the augmentation of site work with library research; and the application of a maximum of three semester hours credit (Commission, 26-27).

Scholarly essays have discussed many internship experience issues over the last two decades (Huseman, 1975; Sanborn, 1975; Alexander, 1975; Porterfield, 1975; and Downs, 1975). Some scholars have examined the microscopic considerations of internships in rural areas (Phelps and Timmis, 1984). Others have noted the macroscopic role of internships in general communication fields, of which public relations is one subgroup (Downs, 1976; Konsky, 1982; Parker, 1977; and Wolvin and Jamieson, 1974). Virtually all public relations textbooks and handbooks include some kind of information on the internship experience (Newsome, Scott, and Turk, 1993; Baskin and Aronoff, 1992; Wilcox, Ault, and Agee, 1992; Bourland and Fulmer, 1992).

While internships vary tremendously in their scope and requirements, all programs must address similar issues such as course credit, faculty and site supervision, and candidacy. Also, even with these varieties of scope and requirements, participants in an internship experience share similar outcomes. A recent essay noted at least eight potentially positive results of any successful internship:

(1) extend classroom principles into professional settings;

(2) summarize, in capstone form, the degree program;

(3) provide the student with experiential learning;

(4) enhance the student's resume and portfolio;

(5) provide opportunities for the student to network with practitioners;

(6) enhance academician understanding of current practitioner concepts;

(7) provide current theoretical insights to the practitioner via the student's classroom experiences; and

(8) enhance the reputation of the institution providing the intern (Fulmer, 1993, 67).

Additionally students have the opportunity to work one on one with practitioners, a faculty-student ratio which could not be afforded by universities in the academic setting.

While there may be significant cost benefits in offering public relations internships, these programs can also be highly labor intensive for the academic supervisor if the integrity of

the public relations program is to be maintained. Inadequate administrative support for internship program supervision can jeopardize the quality of the learning experiences since management of an internship program is often viewed as a "service to the program" rather than as teaching. The positive side of the management of this practical component was described in an earlier article which highlighted the need to balance practical and academic opportunities: "The benefits, of course, are better and more internships, stronger alumni relations, and more opportunities for pooling efforts between professors and professionals" (Bourland, 1993, 12).

The current research project was designed with these issues and concerns in mind because despite the diversity in the internship programs offered at different schools, the administrative questions remain remarkably similar. What kind of credit should be given to students, to faculty, and even to site supervisors? What are the criteria for interning and for becoming an internship site? What are the criteria for evaluating the intern as well as the site? What are the roles and the role relationships of the faculty and site supervisors with each other and with the intern? These questions, and the need for their subsequent answers, provided the guiding focus of this exploratory investigation and evaluation of the public relations internship program.

METHODOLOGY

To answer these questions, an analogical critical method was employed to compare and contrast an existing public relations internship program with an historically significant and well-established similar program from another discipline. The usefulness of analogical criticism is documented in a variety of sources (Bradley, 1983). Particularly useful to this study is the *cross-disciplinary* nature of analogical examinations. By comparing a public relations internship program with a similar, **but out-of-discipline program**, the strengths and weaknesses of the internship program are more easily identified. Additionally, there is less likelihood of a disciplinary bias which might result from a comparison of the public relations program to another communication program.

While others have surveyed students from a variety of mass communication related programs (Basow and Byrne, 1993), this particular study used a case analysis method employing a student-teaching model as a comparative basis for self assessment. This study allows for verification of an analogy as well as for suggesting a model that internship program supervisors can tap into in evaluating and upgrading programs. The student-teaching model offers four significant advantages as a means of assessing public relations programs: (1) the rich literature base in this field; (2) the fact that student-teaching programs must be nationally accredited and so have met some degrees of standardization; (3) the established role relationships of

student teachers, supervising teachers and academic supervisors; and (4) the model represents the merging of the practical and the theoretical.

The three authors of this study each brought important experiences which allowed for a degree of triangulation to reduce bias in the interpretation of the data and to provide a more comprehensive self evaluation. One author, at another university, served as an academic supervisor for student teachers in the area of speech communication. Another, while currently serving as director of the public relations internship program, at the time of the study headed the authors' university's regional reaccreditation efforts and maintained an office outside of the department for two years. The remaining co-author was public relations internship director for eight years. It should be noted that the latter two co-authors also participated in the undergraduate public relations internship program. The former author participated in a student-teaching program as part of the requirements of the undergraduate degree program in speech communication to obtain teacher certification.

The comparison began by extracting key issues, philosophies and actual requirements from documents provided by the education college's lab experience coordinator. These issues were then checked against documents available through the internship coordinator(s). Every effort was made to find material documenting philosophies and procedures rather than relying on the coordinator to provide any information *post hoc*. Materials

used included information available to the students in the form of policy statements, fact sheets, letters and contracts; as well as documents of program work described in a proposal to the board of regents for a full degree (versus an emphasis) in public relations, standard site letters and contracts, and tenure reports.

The programs for this study are administered in a mid-sized university in the southeastern United States. The public relations program requires that students complete an internship which allows them to apply the classroom experiences in a professional public relations setting. Since the internship is required, students earn fifteen hours for the successful completion of a full-term (one quarter) internship. Students intern at pre-established sites usually in or near their hometowns. The program is coordinated (application review, placement decisions, contractual work and evaluation) by an academic supervisor and managed by a public relations practitioner with demonstrated experience in the field. Most students intern one of their last two quarters since certain skill levels are assumed necessary to take.full advantage of internship opportunities.

Similarly, to complete a degree in education, the students must successfully complete fifteen hours of student teaching. The general purpose of student teaching is to put into practice the theories acquired in formal training. Formal training for the student teacher usually begins in the sophomore year during

the first professional education course sequence. After the student completes course requirements and is admitted to the teacher education program, the university supervisor will place the student at an approved site in the public school system. The student teaching experience is monitored by a university supervisor and a supervising teacher from the public school. Student teaching experience must include observing, assisting, planning and teaching. Guidelines for professional education training, including student teaching, have been established by the state's Department of Education.

RESULTS

From the general descriptions of the programs, many similarities in the programs are evident already, similarities further documented through the analogical analysis. These similarities include the objectives, the relationships of the parties involved in the programs, credit, evaluation, and screening. Differences, on the other hand, involved the extent of student preparation and evaluation, the type of evaluation, and the benefits afforded the supervisors whether academic or professional. The following review of the results overviews these issues which were abstracted in comparing and contrasting the programs.

Similarities

While the programs obviously are not identical, substantial similarities could be delineated. First, the programs are nearly identical in their stated objectives in that both student teaching and public relations internships offer students the opportunities to apply what they have learned in classes. Both programs serve as a testing ground where skills can be defined and refined under the direction of professionals. Enhancing problem-solving skills is one specific objective shared by both programs. The student is afforded the opportunity through observing, planning and designing to "practically" implement theory.

Since the assumption of these two lab-type experiences is application and demonstration of class concepts, one can assume that candidates will be screened. The students must have the appropriate coursework to begin any application. The education program provides concrete preparation before student teaching, *i.e.*, specific classes, observations, participation in schools, etc.; the internship program provides similar experiences but in a less specified format. Before a student is eligible for an internship he or she generally has completed coursework involving the production of a major campaign or at least completed public relations classroom experiences, participated in the student professional organization, etc. Both programs call for the students to prepare for the field experience. The successful completion of such pre-clinical experiences becomes paramount in

screening candidates for student teaching and internships. Students in both programs must submit formal applications which are screened by university supervisors pertaining to class completion and grades.

As there is some screening of internship candidates, so is there screening of site supervisors. Criteria have been clearly established for the student teaching supervisor. Some qualifications for initial selection include: a renewable or life teaching certification, a minimum of two years successful teaching experience, a commitment to or completion of qualifying courses, and a willingness to work with student teachers. While the field of education may be able to specify criteria for the student teaching supervisor, the job of selecting a public relations site supervisor is more difficult to specify. One explanation is the diverse backgrounds and experiences of public relations professionals who can have many different titles. Still, the assumption is that for students to learn, they must work for people who have experience, and preferably public relations academic training in addition to continued professional training. Sites cannot "hire" an intern to fill a public relations need or function that these sites might have. Supervision, mentoring and teaching must still occur on the site, and in the judgment of the academic supervisor, the site supervisor must work full-time in carrying out public relations/communication work for an organization.

Both programs also assume that the "lab" experience is still a form of class work and so should receive credit. At the university in the case study, the same amount of credit can be earned by student teachers and public relations interns. The programs require that the student devote one academic quarter to the practical component of his/her educational experience. During this time, students are encouraged to participate in diverse work related experiences enabling them to gain practical understanding of their chosen career.

Finally, another recurrent theme in both programs is the relationship of the student, the academic supervisor and the site supervisor. Open interaction among the triad is fundamental to the success of both programs. This open interaction should provide the intern/student teacher with the necessary feedback to monitor performance. The final evaluation of both the intern and student teacher is the end result of open and honest interaction between the university supervisor and supervising teacher.

Differences

While the programs remain consistent in their basic schemata, details did make differences. The preparation for student teaching appeared to be more extensive and focused on this ultimate aim. Education students must complete student teaching during their last academic terms, whereas public relations students complete their internships some time during their senior year although most often this occurs during the last

term. The "block" component prepares student teachers for specific work in a specific grade the quarter before student teaching; public relations classes prepare students for general public relations work whether the internship is to be completed at a hospital, an agency, a company, a non-profit organization, etc. Naturally, part of the more structured approach leading to student teaching can be attributed to state certification requirements.

While education students had far more practical preparation, they also could expect far more evaluation ranging from a greater number of reports (including lesson plans) to a greater number of scheduled and unscheduled on-site visits which would include observation. The university supervisor makes four visits to meet with or observe the student teacher. During these visits the university supervisor would expect to observe the student teacher enacting a specific lesson plan. The very nature of public relation activities makes this type of observation impossible. A public relations supervisor could certainly expect the students to develop and complete "plans," but observing students working at computers or on the telephone does not seem as useful as viewing end results. Site supervisors, instead, are relied upon to speak to the students' work habits (working quickly, being resourceful, meeting deadlines, etc.)

Evaluation, furthermore, differs in that public relations students received three letter grades while the student teachers received an "S" or a "U," satisfactory or unsatisfactory. The

letter grade determinations are based on (1) the quality of writing, (2) portfolio and project material, and (3) the student's work habits, initiative and professionalism.

Student teachers are generally not sent out for their lab experiences during the summer, whereas public relations interns find the field very competitive as students from many schools converge on all internship opportunities.

Student teachers also work for credit only. Public relations students can work for credit as well as stipends. These stipends range from $500 to $1500, but the majority of sites do not offer direct compensation. Indirect compensation ranges from permitting the students to use office supplies (e.g., computers and paper) for their job searches to sending or taking students to professional meetings and workshops.

Faculty supervisors at this particular university have negotiated for one class of reassigned time for every 15 students on internship. The equation for the student teaching supervisors is four students equals one class of reassigned time. Proportionately, the reassigned time is roughly equivalent when factoring in the four site visits for education against the one site visit for public relations.

The site coordinators also receive significant advantages in the student-teaching arena. All supervising teachers receive an honorarium for working with the student teachers. The amount of the honorarium is dependent upon the training the supervising teacher has received. The university has established three

courses that prepare the supervising teacher in facilitating the student teaching experience. Completion of this course work entitles the supervising teacher to a higher honorarium.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on these similarities and differences, the analogical analysis can further be extended for prescriptive purposes. Ideas can be drawn from the student-teaching model to improve upon the public relations program. This program, as well as others, may want to consider some of the following suggestions. The campaigns class could serve as the public relations version of "block" as in most universities it is already viewed as a capstone course; it could be a requirement for an internship completed for academic credit. In addition, another form of block -- an internship or professional experience training component -- could be integrated into the curriculum as a separate class, convocation or adjunct to another class. Many of the site supervisors have recommended some sort of practical training since students often arrive with little sense of basic office skills and protocol. This training component could include application and interviewing procedures as well.

Student teachers also review curriculum issues while student teaching. Interns could certainly benefit from a similar application in terms of reviewing and reporting on professional issues that relate to the site of the internship. Information could come from sources such as professional meetings and reviews

of professional journals. This application could be extended further by having the students devise lists of community and professional resources such as printing services, media contacts, etc. This would be akin to the student teachers listing of possible guests and sources of information for classes.

Other suggestions related to formalizing procedures. There is a student need for greater documentation of the program requirements, policies and procedures. Also, placement information should be shared directly with the student's advisor in case the internship application is rejected or certain requirements have not been met (*e.g.*, grades, coursework, etc.).

Other ideas may be to provide opportunities for professionals to attend seminars to learn more about the academic program as well as internship management and evaluation. The public relations program may even consider offering non-credit workshops for interested professionals. Mid-term seminars for students would be useful way for conducting self evaluations based on peer reports of their internships. The seminar also facilitates a discussion of internship programs in a non-threatening environment.

CONCLUSIONS

Analogical analysis provided an opportunity to conduct self assessment. Other forms of qualitative analysis could also provide rich data to improve internship programs, classes, and the processes of public relations. For example, in the area of

internships, participant observation by internship faculty could provide a better understanding of the integration and particular roles of interns as well as their role relationships with others. Content analysis of student evaluations, with and without formal checklists, could clarify criteria used to judge student's work. Both of these examples would help build internship programs and would also enrich our understanding of public relations.

Analogical criticism also suggests ways in which the established program (in this case, education) may be improved as a result of the comparison to the newer program. Specifically, the public relations internship requirement of a final, summarizing paper, designed to encapsulate the internship and degree program experience, might help the student teachers in a similar fashion.

Program flexibility is a prime requirement for all educators attempting to prepare students for life beyond the campus, and program evaluation is important to these two programs of education and public relations. Comparisons between these programs are useful in strengthening both the future public relations practitioners and future teachers. The ideas generated by this exploratory essay are offered to answer, in part, the questions of public relations internship management cited in the Introduction. The cross-disciplinary analogies between public relations and education provide potential answers to enrich both programs.

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